

**THE RACIAL PREJUDICE TOWARD THE BLACK IN
AMERICA AS REFLECTED IN MAYA ANGELOU'S
SELECTED POEMS**



**Submitted as a Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Getting Bachelor
Degree of Education in English Department**

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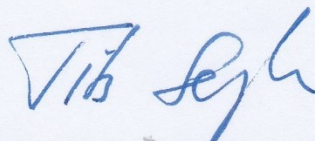
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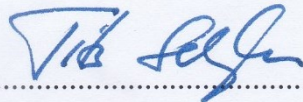
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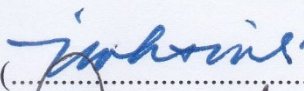
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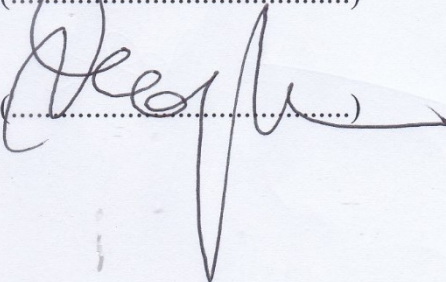
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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meneliti prasangka rasial di Amerika terhadap ras kulit hitam yang tercermin dalam tiga puisi pilihan dari Maya Angelou. Puisi yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini yaitu *Still I Rise* (1978), *Amerika*, dan *Weekend Glory*. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori prasangka rasial dari Herbert Blummer dan juga teori Goldmann dalam genetik strukturalisme untuk menganalisis unsur ekstrinsik puisi. Deskriptif kualitatif dipilih untuk meneliti dengan menggunakan data primer dan data sekunder. Penelitian ini memiliki tujuan untuk mengetahui prasangka rasial apa saja yang ada dalam ketiga puisi tersebut, untuk menganalisis unsur-unsur dalam puisi, dan untuk mengetahui faktor apa saja yang membuat pengarang menciptakan ketiga puisi tersebut. Hasil dari penelitian ini antara lain prasangka rasial dalam puisi *Still I Rise* (1978), *Amerika*, dan *Weekend Glory* terjadi dalam kehidupan ekonomi dan proses politik dan hukum. Selain itu, puisi tersebut diciptakan dengan menggunakan beberapa unsur intrinsik puisi yaitu rima, tekanan, perasaan, dan gaya bahasa serta puisi ini diciptakan karena adanya fakta kemanusiaan dan konsep subjek kolektif dari Maya Angelou.

Kata Kunci: Maya Angelou, Rasisme, Prasangka Rasial, Genetik Strukturalisme.

Abstract

This study intends to discuss the racial prejudice in America towards black race which is reflected in the three selected poems from Maya Angelou. The poems used in this research are *Still I Rise* (1978), *America*, and *Weekend Glory*. This study uses the theory of racial prejudice from Herbert Blummer and also Goldmann's theory of genetic structuralism to analyze the extrinsic elements of poetry. Descriptive qualitative is chosen in this research with using primary data and secondary data. The research has purpose to find out what racial prejudices exist in the three poems, to analyze the elements in the poems, and to find out what factors make the author create the three poems. The results of this study include racial prejudice in the poem *Still I Rise* (1978), *America*, and *Weekend Glory* occurring in economic life and political and legal processes. In addition, the poem was created by using some intrinsic elements of poetry, namely rhyme, tone, feeling, and figurative languages, and this poem was created because of the facts of humanity and the concept of collective subject of Maya Angelou.

Keywords: Maya Angelou, Racism, Racial Prejudice, Genetic Structuralism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Racial prejudice is one form of racism that occurs because of the negative assumptions of certain groups against other groups. One form of racial prejudice occurs in America. Prejudice against black race or African-American descent carried out by white race makes some people from black race feel they don't get proper justice when living in the country where they live. One of them is Maya Angelou, a writer, orator, poet, an artist of African-American descent who creates many literary works with the theme of racism. In literature, the forming elements of literature have a big influence on the creation of these literary works. Both the intrinsic and extrinsic elements must be mutually sustainable. The poems entitled *Still I Rise* (1978), *America*, and *Weekend Glory* implicate racial prejudice toward the black in America. The three poems feature elements of literary works which are not only created by itself but also a series of structures that are formed from interactions between subjects and social situations.

There are three researchers who discuss poems, issues or theories in common with the researcher. The first researcher is Cyrillia Prima Arthami (2017) with the result was the theme told the determination to get up from the adversity with the desire to survive. *Still I Rise* told the African Americans who got false assumptions and injustice from the White Americans and *Caged Bird* conveyed the slavery experience to the African-American and the art movements they made as a result. The second researcher is Adawiyah R A (2015). The researcher tried to see the relation between the content of literary work and the social element of the society. The result of the study showed that prejudice, discrimination, segregation, and violence were the forms of racism toward the slave of African-American. The other researcher is Mayza Nisrin Abielah (2016). The aim of the study was to discuss the racial prejudice in Harper Lee's novel *Go Set a Watchman*. The result showed that the racial prejudice happened in the four aspects of social structure, there were economic life, political and legal process, family patterns and intermarriage, and also aspect of education.

Based on the previous study, the researcher has two reasons in this research; firstly, many people often have negative assumptions about others without knowing the truth and understanding that everyone is not the same even if they are in a group that is considered bad. Secondly, Maya Angelou's background is able to make her a person who inspires many people through her amazing works. The researcher uses the theory of racial prejudice as the main theory of Blummer (1958). According to Blummer (1958:5), the feeling of group position is an ongoing process in which the dominant race are led to define and redefine the subordinate race and the relationships between them. In addition, the researcher also uses genetic structuralism theory from Goldmann to find out the reason for the author created the poem.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The researcher conducts qualitative research study. Bogdan and Taylor in Moleong's book (2014: 4) stated that qualitative research methods as research procedures that produced descriptive data in words or oral from people and observable behavior. This method was directed at the intact or individual holistical background so that this research might not separating individuals or organizations into variables and needed to view them as part of a whole. The main object of this research is the racial prejudice toward the black in America. The primary data source is selected poems by Maya Angelou in Maya Angelou's soft copy book with entitled *The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou* that published in 1994. The secondary data sources are biography from Maya Angelou, internet and the other sources that related with the research. For collecting the data, the researcher uses five steps as follows; (1) Reading *the Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou*, (2) Choosing the poems that related with the issues of the study, (3) Understanding about the content of the poem, (4) Searching to the internet to get information related with the object of the study, and (5) Identifying and making the point of the poem based on documentation. The researcher uses qualitative data analysis by Miles and Huberman (1994) for techniques of

data analysis that consist of three stages, as follows; data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusion and verification. The researcher uses two triangulations to explain the object of the study, namely triangulation of data source and theory triangulation.

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Racial Prejudice in Maya Angelou's Selected Poems

3.1.1 Racial Prejudice in Economic Life

The social stucture of economic life is depicted by Maya Angelou through *Still I Rise* (1978), *America*, and *Weekend Glory*.

3.1.1.1 Feeling of Superiority

This feeling is the existence of confidence from the dominant racial group that they are better and superior to subordinate groups. This feeling is associated with thoughts such as laziness, greed, dishonesty, irresponsibility, unreliable, ignorant, and immoral from the subordinate race. In the poem, feeling of superiority in economic life is demonstrated through the poems of *Still I Rise*.

Did you want to see me broken?

Bowed head ang lowered eyes?

Shoulders falling down like teardrops.

Weakened by my soulful cries. (Lines 13-16)

Dominant groups do not want to see black races superior to their race. The use of words that dropped as Maya Angelou described clearly that the white race wanted to make the black race suffer. Maya tried to attract her attention with questions that revealed her.

In another example, *Weekend Glory* poem also talks about the low employment status of the black race,

especially for women. *Weekend Glory* explaining the real life of Maya Angelou and the differences in the work classes that she experienced. Low employment status occurs because of the assumption that the black race is considered not to have good skills and cannot be relied upon. In the *Weekend Glory*, it is seen that there is a position status in terms of employment. Maya who is just a factory worker with a modest salary shows that black women experience social prejudice because of the assumption of the white race that the black race is not reliable and they are not inferior to the white race.

3.1.1.2 Feeling of Proprietary Claim to Privilege and Advantage

The feeling means feeling of dominant race that feel more entitled to exclusive rights and certain fields. Dominant groups do not like it if subordinates get the same privileges in every aspect of life. Racial prejudice is found in Maya's poem entitled *America*.

Her crops of abundance

the fruit and the grain (Lines 5-6)

Have not fed the hungry

Nor eased that deep pain (Lines 7-8)

This feeling is also shown by the white race against the black race where America is a country inhabited by the native American race and the African-American race. America which has many natural resources is not given equitably to the people. There are still many people who are starving, especially the black race. Claims of proprietary to privileges and advantages are only given to the dominant race.

3.1.1.3 The Suspicion and Fear

Racial prejudice also occurs because of the assumption that the subordinate race will threaten their race. This is shown in *Still I Rise* (1978). Dominant races evaluate that the black women are always close to crime or bad deeds. Black women claimed they could only be slaves or prostitutes. Maya Angelou shows that she is able to rise from oppression as in the title of this poem *Still I Rise* (1978) and even Maya Angelou does not intend to threaten anyone because the notion of a criminal is only a prejudice of the white race.

*You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise. (Lines 21-24)*

3.1.2 Racial Prejudice in Political and Legal Process

Racial prejudice in the political and legal process occurs because white races consider black races to be unreliable and are not responsible for participating in the election or voting process. This racial prejudice is often shown that the black race is criminal. In addition, there are many black races are not get justice in law. Racial prejudice in the political and legal process in the poem *America* is due to the feeling of proprietary claim to privilege and advantage towards black races.

3.1.2.1 Feeling of Proprietary Claim to Privilege and Advantage

Dominant races have highest proprietary because most dominant races are legal leaders. Subordinate races commit many crimes that get them involved in legal cases. The legal process does not apply fairly. Dominant races, which mostly win in court because they can afford lawyers, and subordinate races can only accept their fate.

In the poem *America*, the discussion of the boundaries of justice is not clearly defined.

Her borders of justice

Not clearly defined (Lines 3-4)

The difference in the court case in law is seen that the black race is a race that is filled with prison cells. They get a lot more severe punishment. On the other hand, money is a power in court because with that they can pay expensive lawyers unlike ordinary people. This concludes that justice does not apply to everyone, and only some people are able to win in legal cases.

3.2 How Maya Angelou Create the Poems

3.2.1 Still I Rise

Still I Rise (1978) is one of the poems in Maya Angelou's third book of poetry, *And Still I Rise* (1978). This book raises the issue of hopeful determination to overcome difficulties and despair. Maya Angelou illustrates her problem in the past that she has experienced about the painful history in her society that made up the story of African-American woman. This poem consists of eight stanzas which in total have forty-three lines. The number of lines in each stanza is different and this poem discusses the subject of black woman problem in her society. *Still I Rise* (1978) is written using figurative languages namely; repetition, simile, and hyperbole. Maya creates this poem for the white race who has oppressed her and also the black race. The oppression carried out by the dominant race makes Maya dares to oppose firmly that whatever they did to her that would not make Maya falls. She will still rise, rise, and rise.

3.2.2 America

America is a poem that describes the facts of the American state. This poem consists of 12 stanzas, each stanza consisting of only

two lines except the eleventh and twelfth stanzas which only consist of one line. Maya Angelou deliberately makes this poem more concise so that readers understand clearly what Maya wrote in her poetry. Maya described this poem directly without using the force of danger like her other poems. Free rhymes are one of the characteristics of her poems. This poem illustrates the existence of racial prejudice that occurs in the economic life where resources in the country are not shared equally among the people. On the other hand, prejudice in politics and law proves that many minority races are imprisoned because justice can be earned with money.

3.2.3 Weekend Glory

Weekend Glory consists of fifty-one lines divided into eight stanzas that in each stanza does not have the same number of lines. This poem is one of the poems of Maya Angelou's book of poetry *Shaker, Why Don't You Sing?*. The poem illustrates the lifestyle of a white people who compared to the way of life of the author as a black woman. The use of rhymes is written freely and the use of metaphor means to emphasize the feeling. This poem tells that her life on Saturday night is more meaningful no matter how hard her life is getting racial prejudice from the community, how she works every day for only a small salary. Maya Angelou knows full well how she must live life with gratitude.

3.3 The Reason of Maya Angelou Created the Poems

3.3.1 Facts of Humanity

The facts of humanity are all the results of human activities or behavior, both verbal and physical, which science wants to understand (Faruk, 1999b: 12). In the poem *Still I Rise* (1978), *America*, and *Weekend Glory* Maya Angelou is the creator as

well as an individual who is directly involved or as a subject in her poem. *Still I Rise* (1978) illustrates that Maya is a black woman who is trying to rise up in the fight against discrimination.

*You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise. (Lines 1-4)*

The poem *America* shows that Maya is one of the citizens living in the country called America, where it has so much injustice.

*I beg you (Line 21)
Discover this country. (Line 22)*

Weekend Glory comes by telling the story of an author who lives full of happiness and gratitude.

*My life ain't heaven
but it sure ain't hell.
I'm not on top
but I call it swell
if I'm able to work
and get paid right
and have the luck to be Black
on a Saturday night. (Lines 44-51)*

3.3.2 Concept of Collective Subject

Collective subject is the subject of historical and social fact where an individual lived in a certain group. *Still I Rise* (1978) describes the issue of race in the United States of America. Maya wrote poem based on the situation at that time. In addition, the poem *America* or *Weekend Glory* shows that Maya Angelou is the subject of a group called black race who live in a

dominant racial environment, that is, the white race. The poem lyric of America:

*Some clichty folks
don't know the facts, (Lines 1-2)*

3.4 Discussion

The researcher analyzed three poems that contained racial prejudice issues. These poems were *Still I Rise* (1978), *America*, and *Weekend Glory*.

Firstly, the researcher found racial prejudice in economic life contained in the three poems. The poem *Still I Rise* (1978) contained feeling of superiority in which the white race considered themselves to be superior to the black race by not allowing the black race to be someone who was famous or successful. Besides that, *Still I Rise* also contained a feeling of suspicion and fear which stated that the black race had a criminal and could endanger the white race where the black race had a dishonest and greedy. The second poem was *America* that contained a feeling of proprietary claim to privilege and advantage. The claim of proprietary was controlled by a dominant race so that there was injustice including economic life. Abundant resources in America were not evenly distributed. Many people especially low races were still starving. This happened because of racial prejudice assumed that subordinate races were not entitled to claim privilege and advantage.

The third poem was *Weekend Glory*. The poem contained racial prejudice in economic life. There was feeling of superiority where this poem told the life of a black woman namely Maya Angelou who only worked in a factory with a small wage where Maya used her weekends to work for extra income rather than occupying herself to have fun like white people. Racial prejudice regarded black women as worthy servants and did not deserve higher jobs than white people. In addition, the researcher also found racial prejudice in the political and legal process in the *Weekend Glory*. There was feeling of proprietary claim to

privilege and advantage where many legal cases befall lowly or black race. They were considered criminals and many got a heavier sentence. In this case money was very important to win court cases.

Secondly, the researcher discovered how the three poems were created. All three poems were made with free rhymes. The first poem was *Still I Rise*. Maya wrote the poem using some figurative languages that were able to support her work to make it looked more poetic. The use of question sentences supported this poem to inform the reader that she deliberately made this poem to prove her inner strength to the oppressing group. *America* portrayed in a tone full of hope and the language used so simple language with the intention that the reader could understand it well. The last poem was *Weekend Glory* which was able to make the reader felt the bitterness experienced by the author. Maya illustrated the difference in life between white people with a life full of luxury but contrary to their original life and the life of Maya Angelou as it was but full of happiness.

Thirdly, the researcher analyzed the reason of the author made the poem. The researcher found there were several external factors outside of the intellectual elements in making poetry. The three poems were created because of the fact of humanity in which Maya Angelou was an individual who was directly involved with the description of the poem that she made. Another factor was the concept of collective subject where Maya Angelou as one of the groups told in her poem was a subordinate or black race that got a lot of racial prejudices from a dominant or white race.

Based on the data and analysis above, the racial prejudice from Maya Angelou's selected poems in the poem *Still I Rise* (1978), *America*, and *Weekend Glory* occurred in economic life and political and legal process with humanity fact and the concept of collective subject as factors making these three poems.

4 CONCLUSION

The research comes to the following conclusions based on the analysis and the discussion on the previous chapter.

A poem has elements that build the creation of the work. The elements are in the form of intrinsic elements and extrinsic elements. Based on Goldmann's theory, literary work cannot be separated of social life of the author. This is reflected in Maya Angelou's poem, which in her work involves the life experienced by the author. Maya Angelou was born of African-American descent as a minority race in America. Maya Angelou's life has received racial prejudice and discrimination. The racial prejudice in the selected poems of Maya Angelou found in three poems that there are have two racial prejudices and the reason of the author creates the poems.

Three of Maya Angelou's selected poems, namely; *Still I Rise* (1978), *America*, and *Weekend Glory* that portray the author as a subordinate race and woman. The analysis of those three poems found that the author has experienced racial prejudice in her environment. The dominant race, the white race, has a prejudice against the lowly group or the black race. The prejudices that occur in economic life are reflected in the poem *Still I Rise* (1978), *America*, and *Weekend Glory*. In addition, prejudice also occurs in the political and legal process that is reflected in *Weekend Glory*. The making of Maya Angelou's poetry involves the elements of poetry which are intrinsic and extrinsic elements of poetry. The intrinsic elements used include the use of free rhymes, strong tone, deep feelings, and some figurative languages used to bring meaning to poetry. In addition, the social conditions experienced by the author at that time made Maya create the poem. The fact of humanity and the concept of collective subject are the reasons the author created her poems. Fact of humanity shows that Maya Angelou is both a poet and an individual who experiences the events told in her poems. On the other hand, Maya Angelou is also a minority race, that is, the black race which gets racial prejudice from the dominant race or white race which means the author is the subject of her racial group.

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